

# Quill & Scope

---

Volume 3 *Volume III*

Article 10

---

2010

## Njinga

Stuart Mackenzie  
*New York Medical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://touro scholar.touro.edu/quill\\_and\\_scope](https://touro scholar.touro.edu/quill_and_scope)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mackenzie, S. (2010). Njinga. *Quill & Scope*, 3 (1). Retrieved from

This Perspective is brought to you for free and open access by the Students at Touro Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quill & Scope by an authorized editor of Touro Scholar. . For more information, please contact [touro.scholar@touro.edu](mailto:touro.scholar@touro.edu).



## Njinga

*Stuart Mackenzie*

It's been getting darker each day I wake, and the dawn's chill is no motivation to leave the house. Yet the coffee soaks in, the Cape Dove chants, "Work harder, work harder," and I know it's time to leave.

Outside, the 55-pound bulk of my Atlas bicycle sits, gently decaying into the morning's mud. Its slowly leaking front tire is in need of a trip to the filling station. As I ease back the warped steel gate of our plot, the subdued quiet of home vanishes with the speeding black exhaust of a passing sedan. Kabulonga is fully awake and scores of Zambians line the roadside, hoping for a lift from a passing vehicle or picking their way to work through the collected puddles.

Few, if any, of these pedestrians are coming from the homes along Kudu Road, but that's where they're headed. Each morning, maids, guards, nannies and garden boys leave the rambling shantytown compound of Mtendere, warding off the cold with bright pieces of chitenge, and making their way to work in upscale Kabulonga. Sidewalks are not a luxury afforded to the poor, and the growing stream of cars forces these unseen labourers further into the mud.

As I urge my cheap, over-built Indian bike further down the road, its bearings creak with each revolution, and the eyes that turn my way are a mixture of amusement and confusion. A white man, a *mzungu*, on a bicycle is an unusual sight around here, and few of these Zambians would believe that I actually prefer riding my bike to driving to work. You can be sure that not a single one of them would be caught dead in the street if they could afford anything with wheels.

Cresting the hill towards Kalingalinga, a bike bell rings frantically and I look up from my bars to see a man speeding in the wrong direction. Without swerving, he brushes past a group of school children, the youngest of which is yanked backwards by the hand of an older sibling. There's no apology from the cyclist, no indignation from the children, just another close call on a Tuesday.

Pulling into the filling station, I wait by the air compressor as a taxi driver fills the tires of his robin-egg blue taxi. Both of the right wheels are small spare tires and the car leans perceptibly to the passenger side. A small grey hatchback roars through the parking lot, scattering women selling bananas, and it pulls up next to the taxi. When the opportunity presents itself, this man goes to take the air hose, paying no attention to me or my bicycle, but the paleness of my skin makes him falter. He looks uncomfortable as I reinflate my front tire, and he brusquely takes the hose from me.

As I leave the filling station and enter Kalingalinga Compound, a group of street kids run, chasing after the bike, screaming their only English at the top of their lungs, "Hello! How are you?" A passing bus conductor, passing literally six inches from my elbow, laughs from his perch on his bus' window. He yells something in Nyanja, but it's too fast for me to understand.

This stretch of road is what I love about starting each new day. The crowd of people, produce, and vehicles, complete with swerving bicycles and the shouts of bus conductors, “Hospital, hospital!” are a heady reminder of the rich colour of Zambian life. This scene is also a stark reminder of the gross gradations in lifestyles that its participants enjoy. Those drivers of second-hand Chinese cars, the ones without a back window with the muffler held up by clothes hangers, will travel further this morning than the woman selling tomatoes will in a month. A hollering conductor packs those who can spare a few cents into a crowded mini-bus, although they’ll be back amongst the masses in just a few kilometres. Across from the bus stop, an old woman with a hammer and rheumy eyes bears hazy witness to this chaos as she pounds fragments of granite into stone dust and gravel.

As a white foreigner, I am normally excluded from such everyday Zambian experiences, but on a bicycle, I manage to straddle the divide, if only for the fifteen-minute commute. Weaving through the bus stop, I’m careful not to take too much liberty with these testy drivers, and I dodge a weaving old man clutching his carton of maize beer.

I’m quickly forced back into the mud by the swerve of a minibus that sees a potential customer on the side of the road. Coming too close to the refuse-choked ditch, I am furious and I yell at the perspiring driver as I pass. He stares back blankly, and I’m unable to tell if he just doesn’t understand me, or doesn’t care. Another passenger crammed aboard the minibus jumps out off the shoulder, and the bus flies 100 meters down the road before jamming on its brakes at a backup. Undeterred, the driver steers his vehicle onto the rutted shoulder and bumps along past the jam, honking incessantly at any pedestrian foolish enough to get in the way.

The last stretch to my office is the least developed of the route, but it is the realm of paper-boys who chase the slow traffic with morning news. A big man in his Mercedes can’t consider slowing down for the teen chasing him, desperate to collect the money he’s owed. The closer I get to work, the thinner the pedestrian traffic becomes, and the potholes fade from the road surface.

It’s not necessary to lock my bike, all the guards know who rides the big black Eagle, and I run in for my notebooks. Ten minutes later, I’m in the passenger seat of a brand new Land Cruiser, and the driver has the air conditioning on. It’s not hot, but we have air conditioning, so we use it. Pulling out onto the road, the driver turns back towards the compounds and our first clinic. Speeding through the potholes, he honks at a mother and child, reminding them to stay off the dry road. I was just here twenty minutes ago, but this time, I know there will be no children asking me how I am, and the conductors will mouth wordlessly as we pass.